

Dan Rather Reports

Episode Number: 705

Episode Title: A Fighting Chance

Description: A young, former Army infantryman, wounded in Afghanistan, rehabilitates himself for a chance to play college football. Plus, western businesses invade the new Libya in search of riches.

TEASE:

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TONIGHT -- THE BLOOM IS OFF THE ARAB SPRING. GADDAFI IS GONE AND WESTERN BUSINESSES ARE POISED TO POUR ONTO THE SHORES OF TRIPOLI. BUT IS LIBYA READY?

RICHARD PETERS

It's wide open. There's everything. So you're talking billions upon billions upon billions of dollars worth of construction here for a long time.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ALSO, A FIGHTING CHANCE. THAT'S ALL ONE FORMER SOLDIER IS ASKING FOR. AFTER SURVIVING IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN, HE WANTS A SHOT AT BIG TIME COLLEGE FOOTBALL.

RATHER

How much have your skills diminished since you were at your peak in high school?

DANIEL RODRIGUEZ

They have not diminished whatsoever. I have gotten bigger, stronger, faster. I jump higher. Ultimately I am peaking. I don't even feel like I'm at my peak yet.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PLUS -- HUGE DONATIONS TO PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS WITH NO NAMES ATTACHED. SUPER PACS THAT ARE SUPER SECRET.

WE'LL BRING YOU THE NEWS, TONIGHT ON DAN RATHER REPORTS.

ACT 1: LIBYA

DAN RATHER (ON CAMERA)

GOOD EVENING. IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT IT'S ALREADY BEEN A YEAR SINCE THE BIRTH OF THE SO-CALLED ARAB SPRING. LAST FEBRUARY, IT WAS LIBYA'S TURN IN THE SPOTLIGHT, AS THE COUNTRY BEGAN ITS SLIDE INTO A CIVIL WAR THAT WOULD EVENTUALLY DRAW IN THE WESTERN POWERS. BUT TODAY, THAT NATION IS FAR FROM THE HEADLINES. THE WORLD'S MEDIA FOCUS TENDS TO BE QUITE FICKLE. THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, THE WORLD ECONOMY, SYRIA AND IRAN ARE ALL NOW MORE IMMEDIATE CONCERNS.

YET WE LOOK AWAY FROM LIBYA AT OUR PERIL. SINCE IT SITS ATOP ONE OF THE LARGEST OIL RESERVES IN THE WORLD, WITH GADDAFI GONE, LIBYA NOW HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO REALIZE ITS FULL POTENTIAL AS AN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE. THAT'S NOT NEWS TO THE CROWDS OF FOREIGN BUSINESSMEN AND ONCE-EXILED LIBYANS WHO ARE NOW POURING IN WITH BIG DREAMS OF STRIKING IT RICH. WHAT THEY ARE FINDING IS A WILD WEST - NORTH AFRICAN STYLE. AFTER ALL, A REVOLUTION DOESN'T END WITH THE DEATH OF A DICTATOR.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE WARM WINTER AIR WAFTS OVER TRIPOLI FROM THE WATERS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN, BRINGING WITH IT A MIXTURE OF HOPE AND DREAD. THE STREETS OF THE LIBYAN CAPITAL ARE PATROLLED, IF YOU CAN CALL IT THAT, BY COMPETING MILITIAS THAT STILL HAVEN'T DISBANDED, EVEN THOUGH THE BULK OF THE FIGHTING ENDED MONTHS AGO.

YET FOR MOST RESIDENTS HERE, DAILY LIFE GOES ON. TRAFFIC CLOGS THE STREETS AND MANY BUSINESSES HAVE REOPENED. THERE'S A FOOD MARKET WITH FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES, ALL GROWN LOCALLY. THERE ARE JEWELLERY STORES, RESTAURANTS AND CAFES WHERE YOU CAN EVEN GRAB A CAPPUCCINO.

BUT THERE IS ONE SET OF BUSINESSES THAT HASN'T FULLY RE-OPENED, THE COUNTRY'S BANKS. AND THAT LEADS TO PERHAPS ONE OF THE ODDEST SIGHTS IN POST-GADDAFI TRIPOLI.

WHEREVER YOU LOOK, YOU'LL SEE BUSINESSMEN PULLING SUITCASES. BUT NONE OF THEM ARE HEADING FOR THE AIRPORT. YOU SEE, THEY'RE NOT PACKING A CHANGE OF CLOTHES, THEY'RE PACKING COLD, HARD CASH AND THEY'VE BEEN HOARDING IT FOR MONTHS, SOMETIMES YEARS. THAT'S BECAUSE IF YOU HAVE YOUR MONEY IN A BANK HERE, THERE'S NO TELLING IF YOU'LL BE ABLE TO GET IT OUT WHEN YOU NEED IT.

MOHAMMAD BUISIER

We -- we have finished Gaddafi, Gaddafi is done, but it does not mean that we have achieved victory, because victory will be explained when we succeed in building a free, prosperous and sovereign Libya, and we didn't do that yet.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FEW HAVE A BETTER IDEA OF THE DISPARITY BETWEEN LIBYA'S CURRENT REALITY AND ITS FUTURE POTENTIAL THAN OIL CONSULTANT MOHAMMAD BUISIER.

BUISIER

See what the corrosion did to the pipe...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HE SPENDS HIS DAYS ASSESSING LIBYA'S DECREPIT INFRASTRUCTURE...ITS RUNDOWN REFINERIES AND AGEING SILOS.

BUISIER

Well, there is a lot to be done, to upgrade the oil industry, because most of what we have is obsolete. Some of the terminals were built in the early 70s and so by international standard, they're obsolete. We need to do a lot of work, 'specially if we're gonna have the growth they talk about.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT LIBYA HAS NEVER COME CLOSE TO REACHING ITS FULL ECONOMIC POTENTIAL. FOR DECADES, INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS AND A LACK OF INVESTMENT LIMITED ITS OIL PRODUCTION. AND GADDAFI KEPT WHAT PROFITS THERE WERE LARGELY TO HIMSELF AND HIS POLITICAL CRONIES. BUT IN THE NEW LIBYA MANY HOPE THAT THE COUNTRY'S VAST NATURAL RESOURCES WILL FINALLY BENEFIT ALL ITS CITIZENS.

BUISIER

They want prosperity, they want, you know, they want the economical situation to improve and they know that oil production will help doing that, you know, to get the capital that's needed for the people to work. One of the reasons of the revolution - the major reasons of the revolution against Gaddafi - was the economical situation, the unemployment, which was about 50-percent. This country is a poor country with oil, so we need the money to make it a rich country.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUISIER TOOK US TO SEE SOME SCENES OF FLEDGLING CAPITALISM, AMIDST THE PRODUCE CARTS IN TRIPOLI'S OLD CITY.

BUISIER

This is the new-born Wall Street in Tripoli. That's where they put the prices, here. And then, by phone, they send it everywhere. And if you come every day about this time you find this meeting.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BROKERS BUSY SETTING COMMODITY PRICES AND CLOSING DEALS. BUISIER SAYS THIS IS THE KIND OF ENERGY YOU'LL FIND IN LIBYA TODAY, AS THE COUNTRY EMERGES FROM A RIGID ECONOMY RUN FOR DECADES ACCORDING TO THE WHIM OF GADDAFI.

BUISIER

We should use the oil to create a different kind of economy. We don't need, you know, the father state, that the state will give us the apartment, will give us the salary, will give us the job. No, the oil should be used to open Libyans into training, into education, so when there is a new idea, it's not a government official coming out and saying, "Okay, we'll do this." No, it's 3, 4, 5 Libyan entrepreneurs come out and compete for it and try to get the money from the bank and they earn their success.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THAT'S WHAT MOHAMMAD BUISIER HIMSELF IS TRYING TO DO. HE SPENT YEARS IN EXILE IN DALLAS, TEXAS, BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL OIL ENGINEER. BUT HE RETURNED TO LIBYA SHORTLY BEFORE THE REVOLUTION WITH HIS WIFE AND ONE OF HIS SONS TO SET UP AN OIL BUSINESS HERE. HE SAYS HE WAS EAGER TO BRING THE FREEDOM HE SAW IN THE UNITED STATES TO THE PEOPLE OF LIBYA. THEN HISTORY HAPPENED.

LAST FEBRUARY, BUISIER WAS THERE ON THE STREETS OF TRIPOLI AS PROTESTS EXPLODED, HIS SON CAPTURING THE SCENES AND UPLOADING THEM TO YOUTUBE FOR THE WORLD TO SEE.

BUT AS THE SITUATION DEGENERATED INTO VIOLENCE, HE AND HIS SON RAN FOR COVER.

BUISIER

They were running after us. It was 2:30 in the morning and they were shooting.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THEY MANAGED TO FIND A MAKESHIFT HIDING PLACE...

BUISIER

Okay, and that's where we spent the night...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT'S A NIGHT HE SAYS THEY WILL NEVER FORGET.

BUISIER

They were outside. We could hear them, go and come, go and come, go... "Where are they? Where are they? Where did they go?!"

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EVENTUALLY OF COURSE, GADDAFI WOULD FACE THE VIOLENCE HIMSELF. CELL PHONE VIDEO CAPTURING A PAINFUL, BLOODY END FOR A MAN WHO HAD INFLICTED SO MUCH PAIN AND BLOODSHED ON HIS OWN PEOPLE.

THE COUNTRY ERUPTED IN EUPHORIA AND MOHAMMAD BUISIER WAS ONE OF THE MILLIONS OF LIBYANS CELEBRATING.

BUISIER

Because this was not a regime, this was a nightmare. And now sometimes I get up in the morning and I say, "Woah, are we really without Gaddafi, his sons, his regime?" So this is number one. Number two I do feel really I wanna help and I feel responsibility. When I see my kid in the States putting his hairdo, skateboarding, going to the movies in the evening and play basketball in the morning, I tell him, "You are very lucky, I would like kids in Benghazi and Tripoli to have the same thing you have here."

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT LOOKING AT LIBYA TODAY, ONE HAS TO WONDER WHETHER THAT IS A REALISTIC DREAM? CAN A COUNTRY BATTERED BY DECADES OF MISRULE, PLAGUED BY CORRUPTION AND POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY EMERGE INTO STABILITY AND PROSPERITY?

RICHARD PETERS

How much business do you think there is going to be over here...?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUSINESSMEN FROM AROUND THE WORLD ARE BETTING THE ANSWER IS YES.

PETERS

It's wide open. There's everything. So you're talking billions upon billions upon billions of dollars worth of -- construction here for a long time.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RICHARD PETERS IS THE KIND OF MAN WHO THRIVES IN A PLACE LIKE POST-REVOLUTION TRIPOLI.

PETERS

Yeah, let's get a hamburger...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HE'S A FORMER NAVY SEAL WHO NOW RUNS A CONSTRUCTION AND SECURITY FIRM THAT SPECIALIZES IN WORKING IN DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENTS. AND HE SAYS THAT LIBYA OFFERS A WEALTH OF OPPORTUNITIES.

PETERS

They're going to need everything from hospitals, to schools, to executive centers. They're looking, they had us design like a little Disneyland, a little Disney World, theme parks. The infrastructure has to be completely redone. They have to put a beltway around Tripoli and redo all the roads within Tripoli. Everything, just everything has to be re-done.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PETERS SAYS, IF YOU WANT IN ON THE ACTION, YOU BETTER COME HERE SOON AND BE WILLING TO PUT IN A LOT OF TIME AND EFFORT.

PETERS

We have a building being built, a six story building that'll be our office facility. And we're planning on bringing engineers and -- project managers, in-country managers. All these people are going to be coming over here and -- so, we're here for the long haul.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND IT IS UNLIKELY HE'LL BE ALONE. A PAIR OF LUXURY HOTELS IN DOWNTOWN TRIPOLI SERVE AS THE MAKESHIFT HEADQUARTERS FOR THE FOREIGN DEAL MAKERS FLOCKING TO LIBYA. OUTSIDE SECURITY IS TIGHT, BUT INSIDE THE LOBBIES ARE HOPPING.

ROBIN LAMB

Hello, good morning, Michael, I've got your text.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ROBIN LAMB IS A FORMER BRITISH DIPLOMAT WHO IS NOW REPRESENTING HIS COUNTRY'S BUSINESS INTERESTS IN LIBYA.

LAMB

There are a lot of people naturally interested in working with Libya. It is a country that wants to develop itself and it has the resources to pay for that development. It is therefore naturally a country which attracts business in a big way.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

LAMB SHUTTLES FROM MEETING TO MEETING...

LAMB

So the Libyans don't have a lot of leverage, I don't think...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND HE MARVELS AT HOW FAR LIBYA HAS COME.

LAMB

But I've got a number which the driver will ring, Abdul Hadi. Do you know Abdul Hadi?...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT HE DOESN'T SUGAR COAT THE CHALLENGES OF DOING BUSINESS HERE.

LAMB

It is -- there has been a revolution. Things take time.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE WHOLE MOOD IN LIBYA IS CHAOTIC...

LAMB

Let's aim to leave at five to ten...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SCHEDULES ARE CONSTANTLY IN FLUX AND SOMETIMES YOU SHOW UP AT THE GOVERNMENT OFFICES TO FIND NO ONE IS THERE.

LAMB

One has to remember that we are in a post-conflict environment and the challenges there particularly in terms of a revolution are that there is insecurity, naturally. That's what a revolution engenders. There is uncertainty about who is in control, who has the authority to award contracts and therefore who you should speak to.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ALTHOUGH NATIONAL ELECTIONS ARE SCHEDULED FOR JUNE, LIBYA IS CURRENTLY BEING RUN BY A TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT, WHICH ONLY ADDS TO THE SENSE OF UNCERTAINTY HERE.

IN THE ALLEYS OF THE CAPITAL CITY, YOU'LL FIND THAT THE GOLD TRADE IS FLOURISHING. MANY LIBYANS ARE SELLING OFF THEIR FAMILY JEWELRY WHICH IS THEN MELTED DOWN INTO GOLD BARS. IT'S ANOTHER SIGN THAT LIBYANS DON'T TRUST THEIR BANKS. AND THAT'S A MAJOR HURDLE FOR THOSE TRYING TO DO BUSINESS HERE.

SAMI GIAZIRI

The banking facilities are still non-existent because there are no banking facilities.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SAMI GIAZIRI WAS BORN IN TRIPOLI, BUT HAS LIVED MUCH OF HIS LIFE IN LONDON. HE CAME BACK TO LIBYA A FEW YEARS AGO TO ESTABLISH A CONSTRUCTION FIRM. HE SAYS LIBYANS FIRST NEED TO LEARN HOW FREE-MARKET CAPITALISM WORKS - AFTER THE DECADES OF GADDAFI'S RESTRICTIVE RULE.

GIAZIRI

It's tough because in Libya it was forbidden to have a private enterprise for many years, for many decades. There was a lot of corruption. To get a project, you had to pay a bribe. To get paid for the project, you had to pay a bribe to get your money. So if you didn't understand the culture and have contacts in the inside, it was virtually impossible to work.

This is not a NATO bombing. This is self-inflicted...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

GIAZIRI SAYS DESPITE THE REVOLUTION, MANY OF THE OBSTACLES TO BUSINESS REMAIN.

GIAZIRI

Unfortunately, a lot of the old cronies, the old rubbish are still there in their old positions. There needs to be a clean-up of all these lackeys of the old regime with their big desks and fat bellies. So, yeah, the fat cats are still there.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT'S SLOW PACE OF CHANGE HAS ANGERED MANY LIBYANS, WHO HAVE RECENTLY TAKEN TO THE STREETS IN A NEW ROUND OF PROTESTS.

DR. ALI TARHOUNI

If you walk outside, that's what they're calling for. They want improvement in their livelihood and they want it quick.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ALI TARHOUNI UNDERSTANDS THE PROTESTERS' FRUSTRATION. HE HIMSELF WAS A POLITICAL ACTIVIST WHO FLED LIBYA IN 1973. HE SETTLED IN THE U.S., TAUGHT ECONOMICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, AND RETURNED FOR THE REVOLUTION AFTER ALMOST FOUR DECADES IN EXILE. SOON AFTERWARDS HE BECAME A PUBLIC FACE FOR THE NEW LIBYAN GOVERNMENT.

TARHOUNI

But one of the things that made it easier for us to achieve this victory is the recognition by the rest of the world for this revolution.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TARHOUNI RESIGNED FROM THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT IN NOVEMBER TO FORM HIS OWN POLITICAL PARTY. HE SAYS IT'S CRUCIAL THAT A TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT NOT RUSH INTO LONG-TERM BUSINESS DEALS THAT MIGHT SELL OFF LIBYA'S ABUNDANT RESOURCES AT TOO LOW A PRICE.

TARHOUNI

This is a country that doesn't have any debt, has not only oil and gas, has the longest coast on the Mediterranean, has minerals that have never been exploited; has alternative powers. So the proximity and the strategic position of Libya can make it a money center that connects the north and the south. So there's a lot of potential.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE CITY'S LOCATION HAS ALWAYS MADE IT AN IMPORTANT TRADING POST AND TODAY THE PORT OF TRIPOLI IS FULL OF SHIPS UNLOADING GOODS FROM AROUND THE WORLD. BUT MANY LOOK AT THE SPARKLING MEDITERRANEAN, A CHARMING HISTORICAL CITY AND SEE ANOTHER BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY.

TARHOUNI

What most of the world see a lot of companies are already talking about is tourism. Tourism is potentially a major source of income for Libya. So there are a lot of bad scenarios that happened, but at the end of the day Libya is liberated and Gaddafi is dead so we're hopeful.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NEW BUSINESSES, A COUNTRY LOOKING TO THE FUTURE, HOPING TO TURN THE CORNER ON A DARK PAST. BUT THERE ARE SOME HERE WHO SEE ALL THIS ACTIVITY AND SAY, SLOW DOWN.

MERVAT MHANI

In a country where families haven't buried their dead, families still looking, searching for their missing, I believe it is too soon to deal with -- the flood of foreign investors -- way too soon.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MERVAT MHANI SPENDS HER DAYS CONFRONTING LIBYA'S GHOSTS. SHE WORKS AT THE NEWLY FORMED MINISTRY FOR MARTYRS AND MISSING PERSONS, WHERE SHE HAS TO ANSWER PLEADING QUESTIONS FROM FAMILY MEMBERS OF THE MISSING AND SIFT THROUGH PAGE AFTER PAGE OF HEARTBREAKING TESTIMONY.

MHANI

Working on this file, the missing file is very emotionally straining. I, I cry daily. I know we -- I know we should separate our emotion from our work but it's very difficult.

We're going right now to one of the grave sites, the mass graves estimated to have about 250 to just over 300 bodies buried there.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MHANI DROVE US TO A MASS GRAVE SITE IN A SUBURB OF TRIPOLI WHERE UNIDENTIFIED BODIES FROM THE RECENT FIGHTING HAVE BEEN UNCEREMONIOUSLY BURIED. THIS IS JUST ONE OF DOZENS OF MASS GRAVE SITES THROUGHOUT LIBYA.

MHANI

The fact that they tell you, "Oh, there's a couple of hundred here in this grave site, or a couple of hundred in the other one," it's beginning to sound like it's a normal thing, but it's not, it's not. It's hundreds of people who have died; hundreds of people who have been buried without the knowledge of their families.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHE SAYS THE COUNTRY HAS MADE HUGE STRIDES, BUT THERE IS A LOT OF WORK STILL TO BE DONE.

MHANI

It's a lengthy process. We need to stabilize the people, stabilize the country, put in place a judicial system, a government, election, educating the average Libyan on democracy, on political issues, before we can really think, before the country can think of foreign investors coming in.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

A YEAR AGO, THE FUTURE OF LIBYA WAS BEING WRITTEN WITH GUNS AND BULLETS... ALL WHILE THE WORLD WATCHED... AND THEN ULTIMATELY HELPED THIS PEOPLE'S REVOLUTION.

BUT NOW IT IS FOREIGN ENTREPRENEURS, LIBYAN EXILES, AND THOSE WHO TOILED UNDER GADDAFI'S OPPRESSIVE RULE WHO WILL BE CREATING THE NEXT CHAPTER. LIBYA, IT SEEMS, IS NOW OPEN FOR BUSINESS.

ACT 2: A FIGHTING CHANCE

DAN RATHER (ON CAMERA)

THIS PAST SUNDAY, MILLIONS OF AMERICANS TUNED IN TO WATCH THE SUPER BOWL... TO CHEER ON EXCEPTIONAL ATHLETES MANY IDOLIZED AS HEROES.

FOOTBALL HAS BEEN CALLED A METAPHOR FOR WAR. TWO ARMIES, OFTEN BEATEN AND BLOODY, FACING OFF ON A FIELD OF BATTLE. BUT LEST WE FORGET AMERICA IS A NATION STILL FIGHTING REAL WARS, WHERE NOTIONS OF HEROISM TAKE ON A WHOLE DIFFERENT MEANING.

TONIGHT, YOU'LL MEET A YOUNG MAN FOR WHOM WAR AND FOOTBALL HAVE COME TOGETHER IN A REMARKABLE WAY. HE WAS RECOGNIZED FOR HIS BRAVERY ON THE BATTLEFIELD THEN RETURNED HOME CARRYING A PROMISE TO A FALLEN FRIEND TO TRADE THE HORRORS OF WAR FOR GLORY ON THE GRIDIRON.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY IS THIS COUNTRY'S MOST FAMOUS HOME TO HEROES. ROW AFTER PERFECT ROW OF MARKERS...SIGNIFYING THE FINAL RESTING PLACE FOR SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE MADE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE.

ON A RECENT WINTER DAY, WE JOINED A FORMER SOLDIER WHO OFTEN COMES TO ARLINGTON TO HONOR HIS FALLEN COMRADES...NAMES HE WILL NEVER FORGET...

SGT. DANIEL RODRIGUEZ

Martin, Gallegos, Kirk, Scusa, Hardt, Griffin, Thomson and Mace...all killed in Afghanistan on October 3, 2009.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

DANIEL RODRIGUEZ HAS LOST TOO MANY FRIENDS.

A FORMER ARMY INFANTRYMAN WHO SERVED IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN, HE VISITS THIS HALLOWED GROUND AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH TO HEAL.

RODRIGUEZ

Arlington is kinda like, everything just comes at me, just rushes to me, just like, you know, I look around, I see all these guys, you know. I see Mace, it's just like it hits me. It hits me hard. It's just one of those days I can never overcome. You know, I just always wanna make sure that I live my life to honor them. They gave everything. They gave their last breath to this country.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND IN THEIR MEMORY...THIS TWENTY-FOUR-YEAR-OLD IS TRYING TO FULFILL A PROMISE TO DO SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY WITH THE REST OF HIS LIFE.

DANIEL RODRIGUEZ KNOWS THAT OFTEN THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH ON THE BATTLEFIELD COMES DOWN TO A MATTER OF LUCK. SGT. RODRIGUEZ IS LUCKY TO BE ALIVE, AND HE'S DETERMINED TO MAKE THE MOST OF IT. SO THIS 5-FOOT 8, 175-POUND BUNDLE OF ENERGY IS TRANSFERRING ALL THE PAIN AND LOSS FROM WAR TOWARDS A SINGLE-MINDED GOAL - TO PLAY DIVISION I, BIG-TIME COLLEGE FOOTBALL.

I MET HIM RECENTLY NEAR HIS HOME IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA WHERE HE'S TRAINING SIX DAYS A WEEK, FIVE HOURS A DAY, NO SHORT CUTS... NO WAVERING FROM HIS NEW MISSION.

RODRIGUEZ

When I go to Arlington and I see my friends that are buried there. It's like somethin' that totally motivates me. That's what gets me up at 6:00 AM every morning to work out. So I'm kinda doin' it for them.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RODRIGUEZ WAS BORN AND RAISED IN STAFFORD, VIRGINIA. GROWING UP, HE ALWAYS LOVED PLAYING SPORTS...

RODRIGUEZ

I played sports because I was an athlete. Somethin' I did my whole life. And it just became second nature to me. Since I was in middle school, I was being recruited by the high school to play both football and basketball.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HIS HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL COACH KNOWS A NATURAL ATHLETE WHEN HE SEES ONE.

COACH JEFF BERRY

He was the type of kid who thought he could do everything all the time.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

JEFF BERRY COACHES AT REGIONAL POWERHOUSE BROOKE POINT HIGH SCHOOL -- WHERE SEVERAL PLAYERS HAVE GONE ON TO DIVISION I COLLEGE PROGRAMS. HE SAID THAT WHILE RODRIGUEZ WAS UNDERSIZED, HE MADE UP FOR IT WITH HEART.

BERRY

He wanted the ball in every situation. The other players were drawn to him, so he was definitely the fun guy to have on the team. He was definitely the guy that kind of rallied his teammates. And made them feel like they could win in any situation.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TOWARDS THE END OF HIGH SCHOOL, RODRIGUEZ'S LIFE STARTED TO COME APART. IN HIS JUNIOR YEAR, HIS PARENTS SEPARATED... AND THEN SHORTLY AFTER HE GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL HIS FUTURE WAS SHATTERED.

RODRIGUEZ

Four days after I graduated, my father passed away of a heart attack. So – it wasn't so much that I wanted to join the military. I was kind of under the impression that Dad was gonna send me to school or send me to college and as soon as that happened it was one of those turning points in my life where I had to become the man of the house.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

JUST THREE WEEKS AFTER HE BURIED HIS FATHER, HE ENLISTED IN THE ARMY. AND A FEW MONTHS LATER HE FOUND HIMSELF HEADING OFF TO WAR IN IRAQ.

RODRIGUEZ

As soon as I was on the first helicopter in Iraq, we were gettin' shot at comin' in. So that was an eye-opener of, "What the hell have I done?"

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RODRIGUEZ SPENT TWELVE MONTHS IN BAGHDAD DURING THE SURGE IN 2007. HIS UNIT LOST TWELVE SOLDIERS, HE SAYS MOSTLY TO ROADSIDE BOMBS.

RATHER

You serve this tour in Iraq. You come back stateside for how long?

RODRIGUEZ

About twelve months, little over twelve months.

RATHER

And then?

RODRIGUEZ

Right to Afghanistan. We knew we were gonna have a toe-to-toe fight out there. But we just didn't know how bad it was gonna be or what we were getting ourselves into at that time.

RATHER

How bad was it?

RODRIGUEZ

My first day in Afghanistan, we flew in about midnight. And the next morning, we got attacked. So I was two for two first day in country, getting attacked.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND RODRIGUEZ SAYS THAT'S THE REALITY OF AFGHANISTAN. FIGHTING THAT WAS SO FREQUENT AND INTENSE HE THOUGHT NO ONE WOULD BELIEVE IT UNLESS HE CAPTURED IT WITH A VIDEO CAMERA.

RODRIGUEZ

I was a dumbass, but I mean it got so bad, we were getting attacked all the time. I was just thinking to myself, I was like, "I gotta document this." You know, one day I want my grandkids to see what I went through. I mean this is just unreal how much fighting we were doing out there so I would just...we would get attacked, the contact would kick off, and there I would be before I even fired a single round turning on my camera just like a cameraman, making sure I got the action 'cause I mean it was unreal.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AS THE WEEKS STRETCHED ON, THE TENSION AT THE OUTPOST INCREASED -- ESPECIALLY AS WORD REACHED RODRIGUEZ AND HIS FELLOW SOLDIERS THAT TALIBAN FIGHTERS WERE PLANNING SOMETHING BIG.

RODRIGUEZ

We kept getting reports that we were gonna get overrun by 300-plus Taliban. But I mean, after a month or two, you just kinda blow it off 'cause you just think they're messing with you...

RATHER

You were how many at this outpost?

RODRIGUEZ

Thirty-five to 36, I believe. Just under 40. We were actually shorthanded when we got attacked. We had less soldiers there since people had gone home for their R-and-R. So the morning of October 3, I woke up around 5:00 am to go down to use the computer. I was wearin' shorts and tennis shoes and a t-shirt and my plate-carrying vest and a helmet and a pistol. And the first rocket hit. And I was just, like, okay. Here we go. Just another day in Afghanistan. And then the second rocket hit and a third rocket hit.

And I just remember goin' to the door and charged my 9 mil and I could hear the bullets comin' in. And my buddy was like- I said wish me luck, you know, just always joking around. And that was probably the scariest run of my life. So I had to run 300 meters back up to my post under fire. And I remember coming around the corner and I was just, like, lookin' up in the mountains. And I just saw sparks everywhere, just muzzle flashes comin' out and I couldn't turn around. The rocks were hitting my legs from bullets whizzin' past me and hittin' by my ankles. So I just told myself I was going to zigzag and make a run for it and I was just shooting the whole entire way. And then I ran out of ammo. And then I had no cover for the last hundred meters of my run. I just ran up, ran through it and I didn't get hit.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HIS GOAL WAS TO MAKE IT TO HIS POSITION WHERE HE MANNED A 240-CALIBER MACHINE GUN WITH HIS GOOD FRIEND, PFC. KEVIN THOMSON, FROM RENO, NEVADA.

RODRIGUEZ

As soon as I made it to the top, I got on the 240. I charged the 240. And my buddy Thomson was comin' out. He was just waking up. And he came out to get on the gun with me to start fightin'.

RATHER

What happened to PFC Thomson?

RODRIGUEZ

He walked out in front of me while I was shooting and he pointed out Taliban, all up along the ridge line. I probably saw about 12 to 13 on that side. And I was just shootin' at 'em, you know, just tryin' to keep their heads down. And as soon as he walked in front of me, I just saw him, like, stiff and he dropped his rifle. And like, his knees buckled. He got hit in the head and he dropped right by my feet. And then I knew it was bad. I knew it wasn't an average firefight.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

INCLUDING THOMSON, THE UNIT LOST EIGHT SOLDIERS AND RODRIGUEZ WAS AMONG THE TWENTY-TWO WOUNDED. IN THESE PICTURES RODRIGUEZ TOOK OF THE AFTERMATH, YOU CAN SEE THE DAMAGE.

AFTER NEARLY 12 HOURS OF COMBAT -- SOME INSIDE THE WIRE -- AN ESTIMATED 150 TALIBAN WERE KILLED. KNOWN AS THE BATTLE OF KAMDESH...IT WAS AMONG THE BLOODIEST OF THE ENTIRE AFGHAN WAR...AND IT EARNED SGT. RODRIGUEZ A BRONZE STAR.

RODRIGUEZ SOON RETURNED HOME AND LEFT THE ARMY WHEN HIS COMMITMENT WAS COMPLETE...

TODAY THE BRONZE STAR...AND THE PURPLE HEART HANG ON A BULLETIN BOARD... FAR FROM PUBLIC VIEW...IN HIS BEDROOM...

RATHER

I recognize you don't want to talk about it in great detail, but the Bronze Star. Not everybody that goes through battle gets a Bronze Star...

RODRIGUEZ

It was written up...heroic actions under fire and presented to me just because I didn't stop fighting. Came down to me throwing hand grenades, and killing at point blank range. There were two of us fighting off a whole entire side of the battle ground, and we pretty much kept the whole entire wing from being overrun on our side.

I had been wounded and I just still fought. I just couldn't get over the fact that my buddy was dead out there, and that there were going to get away with it. And I hit that point where I knew I was going to die, like I said, and I was just going to kill as many of them before they killed me. I know how many they were, but I was not going to stop shooting until it was done. And it just wasn't my day to go. And I got a medal for it.

RATHER

For what are you fighting when you are there and doing it?

RODRIGUEZ

For the guy next to you. I don't give a damn who Tommy Taliban is, I don't know him. I had orders. But whenever you try and put my life in jeopardy, and the life of my men, I am going to kill you. And that's what I did. And they hit somebody that was my guy...they hit my best friend and they had to pay.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

AND FOR RODRIGUEZ, HIS LIFE WOULD BECOME ALL ABOUT A CONVERSATION HE'D HAD WITH HIS BEST FRIEND...KEVIN THOMSON...NOT LONG BEFORE THOMSON DIED.

RODRIGUEZ

About three weeks before the fight happened-- we like, seriously were talking. He wanted to go back and be a butcher. And I was like, "Well, you better do it." He's like, "I'll do it." He's like, "You better play football." I was like, "Well, let's promise each other we're gonna get out and do it." And we did. And I told him, I told him I'd give him my word that I would do everything I could to play football some day and when I got out I was going to try and walk on and at the time I was just was kinda saying it. I didn't really take to heart how serious that I was gonna be about it until he was killed.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHEN HE CAME HOME, DANIEL RODRIGUEZ DECIDED TO CHANNEL HIS ANGER AS DETERMINATION...IN A NEW BATTLE HE'S STILL FIGHTING EVERY DAY....THAT PART OF THE STORY IS NEXT.

ACT 3: A FIGHTING CHANCE

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SPEND A FEW HOURS WITH DANIEL RODRIGUEZ, AND IT'S VERY CLEAR THIS IS A SERIOUS YOUNG MAN FULL OF DETERMINATION. YOU COULD SPECULATE ABOUT WHAT'S MOTIVATING HIM, BUT THERE'S NO DENYING HIS HEART.

HE WAKES UP AT 6 AM EVERY MORNING, THERE'S A QUICK BREAKFAST... AND THEN IT'S STRAIGHT TO THE GYM. HOUR AFTER HOUR, GRUELING WORKOUT AFTER GRUELING WORKOUT, BUILDING STRENGTH AND SPEED THROUGH SOME UNIQUE EXERCISES.

RATHER

How's this going?

RODRIGUEZ

It's going really well. I'm getting stronger than I thought I would ever, faster, maintaining my ball control, my speed, my agility.

RATHER

At anytime working out, has the thought crossed your mind, “This is not going to work? I’m not big enough. I’m starting too late. I just will quit?”

RODRIGUEZ

No, No, Never. I don’t believe in quitting.

NICK WALLACE

Phenomenal work ethic. Just full of character. He’s a guy that’s obviously a leader, too. Just a pleasure to work with.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NICK WALLACE IS A FORMER COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYER TURNED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH. HE HEARD ABOUT RODRIGUEZ AND SIGNED UP TO HELP ELEVATE HIS GAME.

RATHER

Let’s talk about age. He’s 24-years-old, just turned 24. I’m a prospective coach, thinking about letting him on saying, “First two years...not going to play much.” By the time I’m at the point where I think he might be playing much he’s 26 years old. Really ancient for a slot receiver...

WALLACE

You can look at it that way... I see it the other way around. He might be much better off being a little older. You see a lot of these guys come in to college at 18 years old get red-shirted because they still need to develop. Their natural talent and ability is there, but their strength is not quite there. With Daniel he’s got all of those things already taken care of...he’s very strong, very explosive. And he is only going to get stronger from here.

RATHER

Well, you’ve evaluated players for colleges, what, 20 or 30 times at least?

WALLACE

Yes sir.

RATHER

If five stars is, in your judgment, can’t miss - where is Daniel?

WALLACE

Absolutely five stars. No question. Goes into, when I evaluate people, I look at the tangible things...strength, speed, agility. But Daniel's got the intangibles...he's got the leadership, the character and the integrity...all the things that are going to make him a great influence in the locker room which you don't find nearly as much as you used to, I don't think. He's just going to set himself apart.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN THE AFTERNOONS, RODRIGUEZ WORKS ON HONING HIS RECEIVING SKILLS, RUNNING ROUTES -- AND CATCHING AT LEAST A HUNDRED PASSES.

RODRIGUEZ ROUNDS OUT HIS DAYS IN HIS BASEMENT WITH A SERIES OF EXERCISES HE MADE UP HIMSELF. HE'S BEEN DOING THIS EVER SINCE HE WAS IN AFGHANISTAN, WHERE HE HAD TO LEARN HOW TO KEEP IN SHAPE WITHOUT A GYM.

AND WITH A THREE POINT FOUR GRADE POINT AVERAGE AT A LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE, HE SAYS HE'S READY TO TACKLE THE SCHOOL OF HIS DREAMS.

RATHER

Where do you want to play?

RODRIGUEZ

Ideally, Virginia Tech would be the dream. So, I was born and raised a Virginia native, a Hokie fan my whole life, so that would be the school I would want to play for.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TO ATTRACT A SCHOOL LIKE VIRGINIA TECH, RODRIGUEZ MADE A BOLD MOVE AND HIRED A PRODUCTION COMPANY TO MAKE A RECRUITMENT VIDEO THAT HE POSTED ON YOUTUBE. IT'S GONE VIRAL WITH NEARLY 50,000 HITS.

RATHER

How did they come about?

RODRIGUEZ

It got to the point where I was training so hard I was like someone needs to see me; they need to see how hard I train and my friends were, like, "We should make a video, you know, like a recruitment video like high schoolers do." And I was just thinking to myself, like, my high school highlights are six years old. No college coach is-- is gonna wanna sit there and see film of me six years old.

RATHER

This may be the best way to get a coach to pay attention or maybe assistant coach to say, "Hey, maybe we should look at this guy?"

RODRIGUEZ

All-- yeah, definitely. It was a smart investment I made that really worked out well.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RODRIGUEZ'S INVESTMENT PAID OFF FASTER THEN EXPECTED WHEN IN DECEMBER HIS VIDEO WAS SEEN BY THIS MAN IN BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA.

VIRGINIA TECH FOOTBALL COACH FRANK BEAMER

We see a lotta videos, and a lotta different type players but you don't see many videos like that.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

VIRGINIA TECH'S FRANK BEAMER HAS WON MORE GAMES THAN ANY ACTIVE HEAD COACH IN DIVISION I COLLEGE FOOTBALL.

BEAMER

NCAA rules-- prohibits us from talkin' about Daniel as a football player. Until he comes to our campus, is admitted to our campus-- then-- we're not allowed to do that. And we certainly don't wanna break any rules from our side, and certainly don't wanna put Daniel's-- future in jeopardy either. But what I can talk about, I think, is Daniel as a person.

His experiences, and where he's been, how his life has gone, how he handles himself-- and I think all Americans appreciate his service to the country. Not only-- one time, but two tours of duty-- Iraq and Afghanistan. You know, this guy's, you know, he's got quite a story.

RATHER

How much have your skills diminished since you were at your peak in high school?

RODRIGUEZ

They have not diminished whatsoever. If any...I have gotten bigger, stronger, faster. I jump higher. Pretty much ultimately I am peaking. I don't even feel like I'm at my peak yet.

RATHER

We've talked about the physical side. Let's talk about psychologically. Sometimes when people have seen the kind of combat that you've seen, they have some difficulty re-adjusting. Have you had any of those difficulties?

RODRIGUEZ

Hmm, yes. Ultimately, at first, it was an extremely difficult process just kinda getting back in the swing of things. I just translate my aggression and my fire - in times when I can't sleep at night because I had a nightmare, or I wake up in sweats, I just translate that into the gym, into the weight room, and I just force and funnel it all through when I play football. It just comes out. And I gotta be around it. I gotta do this, I gotta fulfill it.

RATHER

In some ways, football is your therapy.

RODRIGUEZ

I truly believe so. I do.

RATHER

Well there is a medical condition, which I know you know, post-traumatic stress disorder. Have you had it? Been diagnosed with it?

RODRIGUEZ

Yes. I've been diagnosed with PTSD--post-traumatic stress disorder--and traumatic brain injury and hearing loss and some other minute things. But um--

RATHER

I wouldn't call those minute.

RODRIGUEZ

Yeah. Well, I could be worse. I got friends without arms so, you know. I, you know, I...I don't sell short the drastic nature of post-traumatic stress. You know, I've had my moments. There's things that I still am coping with, but um...I'd never want to use it as a crutch. I never will.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HE HAS PLAYED ONLY ONE MEANINGFUL GAME OF FOOTBALL SINCE HIGH SCHOOL -- BACK ON CHRISTMAS DAY, 2009. JUST 12 WEEKS AFTER THOMSON AND THE OTHERS WERE KILLED, RODRIGUEZ AND SOME FELLOW SOLDIERS ORGANIZED A SCRIMMAGE ON A DIRT FIELD IN AFGHANISTAN. HE WAS SPORTING THE LOGO OF HIS FAVORITE COLLEGE TEAM.

BEAMER

Over the years, I think we've been a team that-- that hasn't always-- gone on, "How big are ya, or how fast are ya?" It's how you play the game. Are you productive? And-- and-- and some programs get into those sizes, and-- you gotta run so fast, you gotta be so big, and-- and then they won't recruit you unless you are. But that's not us. It's how do you play the football game? So-- with that in mind-- I think it's likely that I'd give -- an under-sized -- over-the-age-- Army guy a chance.

RATHER

If your dad could see you now what do you think he would think?

RODRIGUEZ

Comin' from a man that never missed a high school game, coached me all my life, I think-- he'd be proud. He would just as ecstatic as I am. And he would be on the sidelines like he was every other game.

RATHER

And what would it mean to Kevin Thomson's memory?

RODRIGUEZ

That'd mean a lot. That'd mean a lot more. I won't ever say that I can put to rest what I went through or put in my back burner. But-- I think-- overcomin' it and kinda doin' it for him and my buddies that were killed, that would mean a lot more than anything. I think that-- I think he would truly be proud of me. I think that-- he would-- he'd be cheerin' me on.

RATHER

If that were to happen, step on the field, member of the team, big game...would that be as close to peace as you're likely to come?

RODRIGUEZ

Yeah, it would be. It would be pretty damn close.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

...DANIEL RODRIGUEZ...AN EXTRAORDINARY YOUNG MAN. MAKE NO MISTAKE, BEING ACCEPTED TO VIRGINIA TECH WILL BE AN ENORMOUS CHALLENGE, BUT WHEREVER HE PLAYS, IF HE PLAYS, RODRIGUEZ LIKELY WON'T COST THE SCHOOL A SCHOLARSHIP. HE IS ELIGIBLE FOR TUITION BENEFITS THROUGH THE G-I BILL.

NOW, UP NEXT ON OUR PROGRAM, WHO'S GIVING TO THE SUPER PACS? EXPECTING TO GET WHAT? WHO KNOWS? STAY HERE WITH US.

ACT 4: SUPER PACS

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

AND NOW TO POLITICS...AND MONEY. WE'VE BEEN CLOSELY MONITORING CAMPAIGN SPENDING THIS YEAR...ESPECIALLY WITH THE FORMATION OF THE SO-CALLED SUPER PACS THAT ARE CONTRIBUTING LARGE AMOUNTS OF CASH TO BOTH PRESIDENT OBAMA AND HIS REPUBLICAN CHALLENGERS.

LAST WEEK SUPER PACS WERE REQUIRED TO REPORT ALL DONATIONS OVER \$200 TO THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS COMMISSION OR FEC. BUT ANYONE BELIEVING THE DISCLOSURES WOULD BE TOTALLY TRANSPARENT WAS IN FOR A SURPRISE.

HERE'S WHAT WE DO KNOW - 310 SUPER PACS HAVE RAISED...SO FAR... \$98 MILLION DOLLARS. BUT IT WASN'T THE AMOUNT OF MONEY SO MUCH AS THE SECRECY SURROUNDING THESE DONATIONS TO THE SUPER PACS THAT HAS PEOPLE TALKING.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

UNDERSTANDING EXACTLY WHERE EACH DOLLAR COMES FROM IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. ACCORDING TO FEC FILINGS, A SUPER PAC SUPPORTING MITT ROMNEY – CALLED 'RESTORE OUR FUTURE' - RECEIVED A \$250-THOUSAND DOLLAR CONTRIBUTION FROM A LIMITED LIABILITY CORPORATION - PAUMANOK PARTNERS L.L.C. - THE ADDRESS ON FILE LISTS JUST A P.O. BOX AT THIS POST OFFICE IN NEW CANAAN, CONNECTICUT.

ACCEPTING LARGE DONATIONS FROM A MYSTERIOUS COMPANY WITH AN ANONYMOUS P.O. BOX IS JUST ONE WAY THAT A SUPER PAC CAN HIDE WHERE ITS MONEY COMES FROM.

DUE TO A RECENT SUPREME COURT RULING, SUPER PACS CAN RECEIVE UNLIMITED AMOUNTS OF MONEY FROM DONORS BUT MUST REPORT THE AMOUNTS AND IDENTITIES OF CONTRIBUTORS TO THE FEC.

BUT NON-PROFITS DO NOT HAVE TO REVEAL THEIR DONORS. SO SUPER PACS SET UP COMPANION NON-PROFITS THAN CAN ACCEPT LIMITED FUNDS.

IN A SORT OF LEGAL MONEY LAUNDERING SCHEME, DONORS GIVE ANONYMOUSLY TO THE NON-PROFIT THAT THEN MAKES A CONTRIBUTION TO THE SUPER PAC OF THE SAME NAME.

ONE OF THE LARGEST DONORS TO THE DEMOCRATIC, SUPER PAC CALED 'AMERICAN BRIDGE 21ST CENTURY' WAS AMERICAN BRIDGE 21ST CENTURY FOUNDATION.

RODELL MOLLINEAU, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN BRIDGE 21ST CENTURY

In a perfect world people would donate equally to both and often, but we are not going to direct them one way or another we want people to feel comfortable with where they are giving and how they are giving.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RODELL MOLLINEAU IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE PROGRESSIVE SUPER PAC AMERICAN BRIDGE 21ST CENTURY. THE GROUP REPORTED RAISING ALMOST \$4 MILLION - \$222,000 CAME FROM THEIR FOUNDATION.

MOLLINEAU SAYS HE'D LIKE TO SEE THE LAWS CHANGED TO FORCE MORE TRANSPARENCY OF WHO'S DONATING TO WHOM, BUT THAT'S NOT GOING TO STOP HIM FROM RAISING MONEY ANY LEGAL WAY POSSIBLE.

MOLLINEAU

If you were to ask is there too much money in politics? Yes, there is too much money in politics, but you're gonna play by rules of the road. There really just isn't another way. We could beat our chest and bemoan the situation that we are in, or we could elect officials that maybe one day will reverse some of this and maybe we'll get some sanity again in some of these campaign finance laws.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE NEWLY RELEASED INFORMATION FROM THE FEC SHOWS THAT AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2011 THE TOP SIX LIBERAL OR PROGRESSIVE SUPER PACS HAVE RAISED ALMOST \$19 MILLION. COMPARE THAT TO THE TOP SIX CONSERVATIVE PACS THAT HAVE RAISED \$60 MILLION.

RESTORE OUR FUTURE - THE SUPER PAC SUPPORTING MITT ROMNEY - WAS THE BIG EARNER LAST QUARTER, RAISING OVER \$30 MILLION THROUGH DECEMBER 2011. AMERICAN CROSS ROADS, A CONSERVATIVE SUPER PAC RUN BY KARL ROVE RAKED IN \$18 MILLION.

AS THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN HEATS UP BOTH PARTIES AND ALL CANDIDATES ARE SURE TO INCREASE THE FUND RAISING AND THEIR SPENDING.

AND WHERE DOES ALL THAT MONEY GO? A MAJORITY GOES TO NEGATIVE CAMPAIGN ADS.

IN THE WEEK BEFORE THE RECENT FLORIDA PRIMARY, MORE THAN 11 AND A HALF-THOUSAND ADS AIRED ON TELEVISION. OVER 10- THOUSAND OF THOSE WERE NEGATIVE.

SUPER PACS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO COORDINATE WITH THE CANDIDATES' OFFICIAL CAMPAIGNS BUT THE LINE BETWEEN THE TWO IS OFTEN BLURRED, TO SAY THE LEAST. FOR INSTANCE RESTORE OUR FUTURE WAS FORMED BY A GROUP OF FORMER ROMNEY AIDES. AND THE SUPER PAC SUPPORTING PRESIDENT OBAMA IS RUN BY A FORMER WHITE HOUSE AIDE.

WHEN THE SUPREME COURT MADE ITS LANDMARK RULING IN THE CITIZENS UNITED CASE, PAVING THE WAY FOR THE CREATION OF SUPER PACS, THEY CAME DOWN ON THE SIDE OF FREE SPEECH - ALLOWING UNIONS, CORPORATIONS AND WEALTHY INDIVIDUALS TO BE HEARD THROUGH THEIR UNLIMITED DONATIONS USED TO DIRECTLY INFLUENCE POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

FREE SPEECH IS A VALUABLE RIGHT - AND ONE THAT SHOULD NOT BE DENIED ANYONE. BUT WHAT IS THE PRICE OF ALLOWING THE INDIVIDUAL VOTES OF CITIZENS FROM BEING SILENCED BY A LOUDER MORE INFLUENTIAL VOICE - THE VOICE OF MONEY?

SOME OF THE VERY CORE IDEAS OF DEMOCRACY - THAT EACH VOTE IS EQUAL AND VOTES CAN NOT, OR SHOULD NOT BE BOUGHT -- ARE BEING TESTED THIS ELECTION CYCLE. VOTERS WOULD NOT BE WRONG TO WONDER IF COME NOVEMBER A DONOR WITH DEEP POCKETS MIGHT BE ASKING THE CANDIDATE THEY HELPED ELECT FOR A RETURN ON THEIR INVESTMENT.

AND THAT'S OUR PROGRAM FOR TONIGHT. IF YOU HAVE A COMMENT OR QUESTION, PLEASE CHECK OUT OUR FACEBOOK PAGE OR FOLLOW US ON TWITTER. OR YOU CAN EMAIL US AT VIEWER@HD.NET. FROM NEW YORK, FOR HD-NET, DAN RATHER REPORTING. GOODNIGHT.